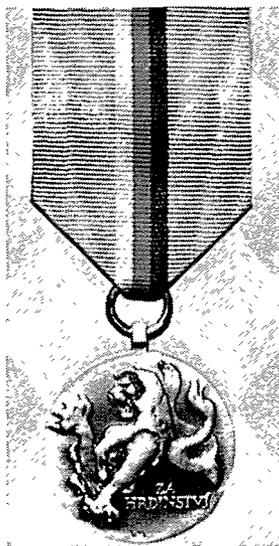


Medal of Merit, 3rd Class
Reverse



Medal for Heroism
Obverse

rampant and the legend ZA HRDINSTVJ (For Heroism) while the reverse has the Greater Coat-of-Arms. The medals and certificates are numbered and include a military style ribbon bar and a civilian lapel rosette.

All photos used to illustrate this article came from Czech State and Military Symbols noted below. They are © by the Czech Ministry of Defense and are used by permission

References:

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A NEARLY WELL - KNOWN LEOPARD

Captain Eric M. Tripnaux, OMSA #4075

I have known OMSA member E. J. Fischer for several years, dating from the time he was worked in the consular section of the American embassy in Brussels. He is a major collector with great experience and knowledge in phaleristic matters, and I appreciated his comments on my limited study of Albanian orders, decorations and medals, both of which appeared in the *Bulletin of the Société Suisse de Phaleristique*.¹

I fully agree with him when he recently wrote in an author's postscript in *JOMSA* about *How easy it is to cobble something together out of very little factual information*.² Better still, in my opinion, is that the best documentation is that which we share amongst ourselves. However, a lack of historical criticism can sometimes mislead opinion. Mr. Fischer knows this, and he took tremendous care in writing about the Zairian Order of the Leopard. Today I can add to his article with additional information.

Zaire, due to a strong historical link between the two nations, is well known in Belgium. Its medallic material, especially the Order of the Leopard, is frequently seen on the market. Many Belgians (both civil and military) have received the three lower grades of the order. Stars, however, remain scarce.

In the early 1960, OMSA made many contributions to knowledge about the awards of the new African states.³ But nothing was written about the Order of the Leopard, which was founded on 24 May 1966.⁴

In 1978, a booklet (in French)⁵ was published in Kinshasa by the Chancery of

¹ Number 46, June 1993, pp 3-8, and Number 47, September 1993, pp 31-39.

² *The Insignia of the Order of the Leopard of Zaire, JOMSA, Volume 47, Number 3, pp 12-15*

³ *The Medal Collector*, D. J. Croll, Volume 13, Number 9, September 1962, pp 4-6, Number 10, October 1962, pp 6-9, and C. E. Hallock, Volume 14, Number 5, May 1963, pp 5-9.

⁴ Law Number 66/329

⁵ Format A5, 36 pages with 17 black and white illustrations.

The Orders and Medals Society of America

the national orders.⁶ It contained the text of an interview given by the Chancellor of the National Orders, Brigadier Tukuzu Gusu-Wo,⁷ to journalists of *La Voix du Zaïre* on the subject of Zairian orders and medals. Due to historical circumstances, President Mobutu Sese Seko created the Order of the Leopard with statutes that were very similar to those of the Belgian Order of Leopold. However, notable differences do exist between the two. For example:

- There are two divisions for the Order of the Leopard, civil and military. The Order of Leopold has a third (maritime).
- Both orders possess a collar, but that of the Order of Leopold was never officially awarded nor worn, while President Mobutu does wear the collar of the Order of the Leopard in his capacity of Grand Chancellor of the National Orders.
- The Order of Leopold is the premier Belgian order. The Order of the Leopard is Zaire's second order, following as it does the Order of the Revolution created in 1974.⁸
- There is no Chancery or Chancellor of the Orders in Belgium, this function being performed by the Service of the Orders, a branch of the Foreign Ministry.

Two interesting privileges are attached to recipients of the Order of the Leopard, a jurisdictional privilege and immunity. With some exceptions a recipient can only be judged by the Zairian Court of Appeal, and cannot be arrested, incarcerated, or judged without presidential authorization.

As with the French *Legion d'Honneur*, each nomination or promotion in the order is to be requested from the Chancery by the candidate himself. The order is supposedly awarded to foreigners on a strict basis of reciprocity, but there have been many exceptions.

⁶ In 1987, the Chancery's address was P.O. Box 2041/Kin 1 in Kinshasa.

⁷ Major General Lundula Okoko Ta Mongo, Brigadier Gusu-Wo's predecessor was the first Chancellor. In October 1995 the office was held by Major General Nkulufa Lombindo Londjali.

⁸ Information published in the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* on 10 October 1995 indicates that the National Order of Zaire, the republics third ranking order created in 1978, is now first. Was this a change or an error. There has been no response to this from the Zairian embassy in Brussels.